

## Documentation of Lakurumau: Making the case for one more language in Papua New Guinea

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This paper provides an introduction to Lakurumau, a previously undescribed and undocumented Oceanic language of Papua New Guinea. The first part of the paper is a guide to the Lakurumau documentation corpus, deposited in the ELAR archive. The participants and the content of the deposit, the technology used for recording, and the ethical protocols followed in the construction of the corpus are discussed. In the second part, a brief grammatical description of Lakurumau is presented, providing morpho-syntactic and sociolinguistic evidence in support of the classification of Lakurumau as an independent language, and some directions for future work are outlined.

**1. Introduction** Lakurumau (no ISO code yet; Glottolog code: laku; also mentioned as Laxudamau, Lakuramau, Loxodumau)<sup>1</sup> is an Austronesian (Western Oceanic; Meso-Melanesian) language spoken in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. So far, Lakurumau has been almost completely overlooked in linguistic research on the languages of Northern New Ireland.<sup>2</sup> It has been previously referred to as a “transitional” dialect or language between the neighboring Kara and Nalik (Lithgow & Claassen 1968:10; Volker 1998:3); Wurm (2007)<sup>3</sup> recognized it as a separate language, calling it *Laxudamau*. I suggest, on the basis of grammatical and sociolinguistic evidence, that the best way to define Lakurumau is as an independent member of the Lavongai (Tungag)/Nalik language chain, established in Ross (1988:291ff).

This paper aims to provide a first introduction to Lakurumau, offering a guide to the documentation corpus deposited at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR;

<sup>1</sup>The decision on how to name Lakurumau for the wider audience has not been an easy one. I had at first decided to use the endonym *Loxodumau* [loyɔdumau]. However, for non-members of the community – people from other speech communities of Papua New Guinea, as well as linguists – the name Lakurumau is more transparent and easier to use (the grapheme <x> is used in all languages of Northern New Ireland to represent the voiced velar fricative, but it can be mistaken for a [ks], leading to the mispronunciation of the language name). Moreover, Lakurumau is the official name of the village and the one commonly used by speakers of other languages in New Ireland to refer to it. I decided eventually, in accordance with the community leaders, to use the term *Lakurumau* for any publication in English, Tok Pisin, or another foreign language, while keeping the endonym *Loxodumau* when writing in Lakurumau.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Eklund (now at Linköping University) did a short fieldwork in Lakurumau in February 1998, which resulted in the transcription and translation of a story, a quite long word list, some Tok Pisin sentences translated into Lakurumau, and a few grammatical notes. This material is unpublished, but the author kindly provided me with copies.

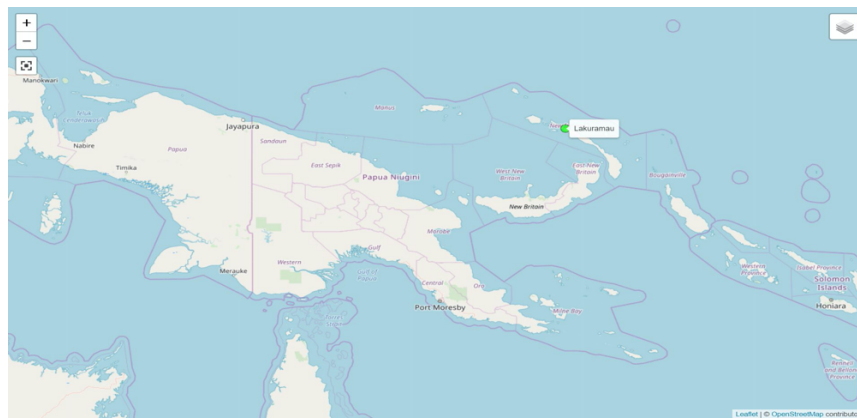
<sup>3</sup>Posthumous publication.

<https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1093372>) and a brief grammatical and sociolinguistic description, underlying the elements that define it as a separate language.

The paper is organized as follows: §1 provides some background information about Lakurumau and its speakers; §2 describes the documentation corpus in ELAR, and §3 presents a typological sketch of Lakurumau. Finally, §4 outlines some directions for future work. Throughout the paper, examples taken from the corpus are referred to with the unique session identifier under which they can be retrieved (e.g., *lox001*); the same is done in the text whenever a corpus session is mentioned.

**1.1 Background** Lakurumau is spoken in the eponymous village of Lakurumau (coordinates: -2.883; 151.250), on the East Coast of New Ireland (Figure 1); I estimate roughly ca. 800 speakers. The village is well-connected and easily accessible, as it is located on the main communication artery of New Ireland, the Boluminsky Highway. Traditional sources of income for Lakurumau people are the production of copra, cultivation of cacao and oil palm, small-scale slash-and-burn agriculture, fishing, and small commerce. Nowadays, many villagers also work at the nearby oil palm company or drive the minibuses connecting the village with the provincial capital Kavieng; some have clerical jobs in Kavieng. The economic vitality of the New Ireland East Coast, begun at the time of German colonization in the 1880s, has attracted many migrants from other provinces of Papua New Guinea and other parts of New Ireland. This has also resulted in a high number of mixed-language marriages.

**Figure 1.** Papua New Guinea and the position of Lakurumau.<sup>4</sup>



At present, Lakurumau is still vital and widely used by the older generations (age ca. 40+) in their daily life, but is not always passed on to children. In a few households, Lakurumau is still the primary language, spoken on a daily basis by elderly family members as well as by children. In most families, however, and especially in mixed households, the intergenerational language is Tok Pisin, the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea.<sup>5</sup> In general, children and teenagers still have a fairly good pas-

<sup>4</sup>Glottolog: <https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/laku1238.bimap.html#6/-5.609/149.711>.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. the speakers' opinion on mixed marriages and mobility as a cause for language decline in Lakurumau in *lox024* and *lox106*.

sive knowledge of Lakurumau but many of them have limited active competence and some children have almost no active competence at all.

Lakurumau has so far been a mostly oral language. It has been taught in the village elementary school for the past few years. Some years ago, Mrs. Dinah Gurumang, a local teacher and Lakurumau language activist, wrote a booklet with some Lakurumau texts and wordlists to be used in school lessons, using the orthography established by the Summer Institute of Linguistics translators for Kara. Unfortunately, all copies of this booklet have seemingly been lost, and I have not been able to recover any of them. In order to foster literacy in Lakurumau, Mrs. Gurumang and I have written three other booklets (see §2.3), which can be used in the village elementary school as well as in the pre-school course *Early Childhood* run by Mrs. Gurumang and other community members.

**2. The Lakurumau documentation project: A guide to the deposit in ELAR** The documentation corpus of Lakurumau is the result of the two-years project “Documentation and description of Lakurumau” (2017–2019), funded by a grant of the Endangered Languages Documentation Program (ELDP). I worked on the project as principal investigator with Mrs. Dinah Gurumang as my main consultant. Mrs. Gurumang has proved an exceptional teacher and language consultant; her family has adopted me as their daughter, and I resided in Mrs. Gurumang’s daughter Mary’s house throughout my stay in Lakurumau.

I was first introduced to the Lakurumau community by Craig Volker, a Linguistics professor at the James Cook University in Cairns who has been working on the Nalik language for the past twenty-five years. In 2016 I paid a short visit to the community in order to speak with the leaders and get their permission to work in the village; afterwards, I had three longer fieldwork stays (October–December 2017, May–August 2018, and April–May 2019). The community’s response to the documentation project has been extremely positive. The whole village has welcomed me during my fieldwork stays and encouraged me to learn their language; they are very glad that Lakurumau has also finally got the attention of linguists. During my fieldwork, I always tried to be as active as possible in the social life of the village, attending social gatherings, and paying daily visits to community members.

The Lakurumau deposit in ELAR comprises at present (as of 2019) 157 sessions for a total of more than 22 hours of recorded materials, 18 hours thereof are transcribed and translated into English. In designing the corpus, I followed Himmelmann’s (2006:1) definition of a language documentation as a “lasting, multipurpose record of a language”. To this aim, I tried to involve as many speakers as possible and to record events belonging to as many types of communicative events as possible, using digital technology and archiving the recorded events in a secure archive (i.e., ELAR). In this section, I will describe in detail the main component of the Lakurumau corpus: participants, content, technology used for recording, literacy materials, and ethical issues.

**2.1 Participants** I recorded 36 different speakers of Lakurumau, 14 males and 22 females (Table 1). The oldest speaker was born in 1933 and the youngest in 2008; most speakers (22 out of 36) were born between 1943 and 1979. The recordings from speakers born after 1980 amount to only 1h39m, of which only 18m is from speakers born after 1995. The recordings by younger speakers, however, already show some change tendencies, such as the increased use of alienable possessive forms instead of inalienable ones and uncertainties in the use of spatial deictics (cf. *lox204* and *lox266*).

**Table 1.** Recorded speakers in the Lakurumau documentation corpus.

Name	Surname	Year of birth	Gender
Wilson	Balane	1954	M
Birau	Dangui	1960	F
Lasey	Garale	1998	F
Luta	Graham	1959	F
Dinah	Gurumang	1952	F
William	Gurumang	1980	M
Immanuela	Ivarapou	2004	F
Natania	Junias	2006	F
Karus	Kaak	1970	F
Rosi	Kagavuk	1956	F
John	Kagavuk	2008	M
Mangana	Kalamaxa	ca. 1955	F
Susanne	Kambariu	1973	F
Taia	Kambavas	1966	F
Emanuel	Kepas	1996	M
Jakobeth	Kilangas	1952	F
Stanley	Lambung	1961	M
Lydia	Lambung	1963	F
Sami	Leri	1933	M
Tom	Loko	1969	M
Magola	Luande	ca. 1950	F
Dangui	Mosly	1959	M
Wilson	Nonok	1951	M
Melitta	Nonok	1953	F
Damaris	Pazopang	ca. 1940	F
Joseph Konda	Pikia	1952	M
Wanariu	Pinaai	1949	M
Roberta	Sarameli	1959	F
Betty	Sikil	1953	F
Merupakai	Teri	1939	F
Tolingare	Tokulaau	1938	M
Alex	Tolivaina	1980	M
Oripa	Waariu	1980	F
Elma	William	1960	F
Narong	Wilson	1960	F
Wilson	Wirimas	1943	M

While many community members helped in the recording phase, even taking some recordings while I was overseas, I did almost all the transcription work and the grammatical analysis with Mrs. Dinah Gurumang, and occasionally with Mrs. Roberta Sarameli. I am aware that it may not be ideal to rely on the grammatical intuition and explanations of only one speaker, and I have indeed at times asked other speakers' opinions; however, in the Lakurumau settings, it was the best solution.

**2.2 Content of the corpus** My main goal in selecting the communicative events to be recorded was representativeness, that is a selection of events that would “allow someone who is not familiar with the language and speech community to gain an authentic picture of how the language was used at the time that the documentation was carried out” (Seifart 2008:63). In order to do that, I tried to record events at different stages of the “plannedness” continuum (Himmelmann 1998:179–180). According to Himmelmann, five types of communicative events can be distinguished, according to a scale of increasing “plannedness” (or decreasing “spontaneity”): exclamations – directives – conversations – monologues – ritual speech events. In the Lakurumau corpus, all five types of events are represented, albeit to different degrees. Monologues are the most often recurring type, followed by conversations. Ritual speeches are limited to spells (which are proprietary and therefore not open accessible in the corpus); exclamations and directives occur often, but always within other types of events: in *lox010*, for instance, a conversation between Mrs. Dinah Gurumang and Mrs. Roberta Sarameli, both participants interact with a child who has walked in the recording, telling her to be silent; in *lox052*, the participants in the recording call for children to bring tea and call to each other for help in wrapping food parcels.

The recordings in the corpus belong to five main genres: narrative (and seven sub-genres thereof), dialogue (and three sub-genres thereof), procedural, elicitation, and music; I largely base my classification on Franjeh (2019). Narrative is by far the most represented genre in the corpus, followed by dialogue (Table 2). In the following, I report with more detail on each one of them.

**2.2.1 Narrative** Narratives constitute the bulk of the Lakurumau deposit; narrative recordings are always monological. All narratives in the corpus have been prompted: I usually asked people to “tell a story”; in some cases, I also provided the topic (‘your family’, ‘how to catch sharks’, etc.). Usually, I would ask the speaker to sit in front of the camera; in some cases, I have been following them around in gardens or in the bush, while they pointed out local plants.

I distinguish seven different sub-genres of narratives. In *personal narratives*, the speaker talks about events they have witnessed. For instance, in *lox006*, Mrs. Dinah Gurumang describes her family; in *lox018*, Mrs. Betty Sikil talks about how she built her house, and in *lox020*, Mr. Dangui Mosly tells how he and his brother caught a pig (Figure 2).

**Table 2.** Genres and sub-genres in the corpus.

Genres and sub-genres	Time (HH:MM:SS)
<b>Narrative</b>	
Personal narrative (eye witnessed)	04:00:30
Traditional narrative (non-eye witnessed)	01:56:40
Fiction	00:17:05
History	00:41:50
Exposition	01:59:46
Narrative stimuli	00:53:42
Reports	00:04:40
<b>Tot.</b>	<b>09:54:13</b>
<b>Dialogues</b>	
Spontaneous chats	01:45:55
Spontaneous discussions	01:30:56
Staged chat	00:06:47
Staged discussion	05:31:54
<b>Tot.</b>	<b>08:55:32</b>
<b>Procedural</b>	<b>00:48:50</b>
<b>Observational filming</b>	<b>00:50:00</b>
<b>Elicitation</b>	<b>01:35:36</b>
<b>Music</b>	<b>00:06:34</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>22:10:45</b>

**Figure 2.** Mr. Mosly in *lox020*.

In *traditional narratives*, the speaker talks about events they have not witnessed, they tell traditional stories, or they explain aspects of the Lakurumau culture. Examples from the corpus are the story of the warrior Malaxon, told by Mr. Dangui Mosly in *lox148*, or the explanations by Mr. Wanariu Pinaai about the Lakurumau clan system in *lox122*.

Under the label *fiction* I classify all the events where the speaker tells non-traditional stories, created especially for the project (such as those in *lox174* and *lox217* by Mrs. Gurumang). In *history* recordings, the speaker tells about historical events they may or may not have witnessed. In this kind of narrative, personal details play a lesser role than in a personal narrative but sometimes the two overlap. Most of the historical recordings in the Lakurumau corpus concern the time of the German colonization (*lox188* by Mr. Tolingare Tokulau) and Second World War (*lox188* and *lox202* by Mrs. Damaris Pazopang).

In *exposition* recordings, the speaker explains explanation of procedures (*lox200*; Figure 3), ceremonies, or names of local flora and fauna. In the Lakurumau corpus, many expositions concern funeral and marriage practices (*lox213* by Mr. Joseph Konda Pikia) and the naming of local plants (*lox071* by Mrs. Lydia Lembung).

In *narrative stimuli*, the speaker tells a story based on a storyboard, such as “The Frog Story” (*lox223* and *lox228*) and the “Fortune Teller” (TFS Working Group 2010; *lox219*). Finally, I label *reports* the recordings where the speaker reports about events such as court cases, community meetings, or events that have occurred in the community (*lox175* by Mrs. Dinah Gurumang on a criminal case that took place in the village).

**Figure 3.** Mrs. Mangana Kalamaxa explains how to weave bags (*lox200*).



**2.2.2 Dialogues** In dialogical recordings, two or more speakers interact with each other. I categorize dialogues into spontaneous chats, staged discussions, and staged chats. In *spontaneous chats*, the speakers talk freely among themselves, without having been prompted to. These kinds of dialogues occur in the Lakurumau corpus mostly as part of longer recordings. In *lox052*, for instance, the participants chat while preparing food for an upcoming funeral (Figure 4). I had left the camera on for several hours, recording most interactions that happened during that time span. The speakers, of course, were aware of being recorded, but they had not been asked to perform any particular task.



In *staged discussions*, I provided a specific topic for discussion, inviting the speakers to talk about it. In *lox024*, for instance, Mrs. Dinah Gurumang and Mr. Dangui Mosly discuss the future of the Lakurumau language, and in *lox135*, Mr. Tolingare Tokulau and Mr. Joseph Konda Pikia talk about the history of New Ireland (Figure 5). In *staged chats*, instead, I merely prompted the speakers to talk freely among themselves in front of the camera/recorder, about any topic of their choice. In *lox014*, for example, Mrs. Betty Sikil and Mrs. Lydia Lembung talk about Lydia's trip to town.

In some cases, I have also been a participant in staged discussions and staged chats, asking questions, or even just trying to chat in Lakurumau. Often the speakers corrected my language use, thereby offering interesting grammatical observations.

**Figure 4.** Mrs. Lydia Lembung, Mrs. Melitta Nonok, and Mr. Emanuel Kepas chat while peeling sweet potatoes (*lox052*).



**Figure 5.** Mr. Tokulau and Mr. Pikia in *lox135*.





**2.2.3 Procedural, observational filming, elicitation, and music** In *procedural* recordings, the speakers explain how to do some activities while doing it and showing it on video. In *lox035*, for instance, Mrs. Roberta Sarameli and Mrs. Dinah Gurumang show how to sew a blouse (Figure 6). Other procedural recordings include the demonstrations of how to cook typical dishes (*lox231*) and how to extract sago fiber from the palm (*lox015*; Figure 7).

I label as *observational filming* the recordings that show an activity not planned solely for the recording – such as a funeral, a ceremony, or any kind of social activity that would have taken place anyway, independently of the documentation project. I recorded only one such event: a community meeting in Lakurumau, where both Tok Pisin and Lakurumau are used (*lox034*).

In *elicitation* recordings, the researcher interacts with the speakers asking questions about grammatical topics or the lexicon, eliciting word lists, paradigms, asking grammaticality judgements, and translating or transcribing other recordings. In *lox239*, for example, Mrs. Dinah Gurumang explains the Lakurumau system of deictics.

Finally, I list under the label *music* the recordings where the speakers do not talk but sing. In *lox212*, for instance, Mr. Joseph Konda Pikia sings a funeral song, which can only be sung by the *maimai*, the traditional chiefs.

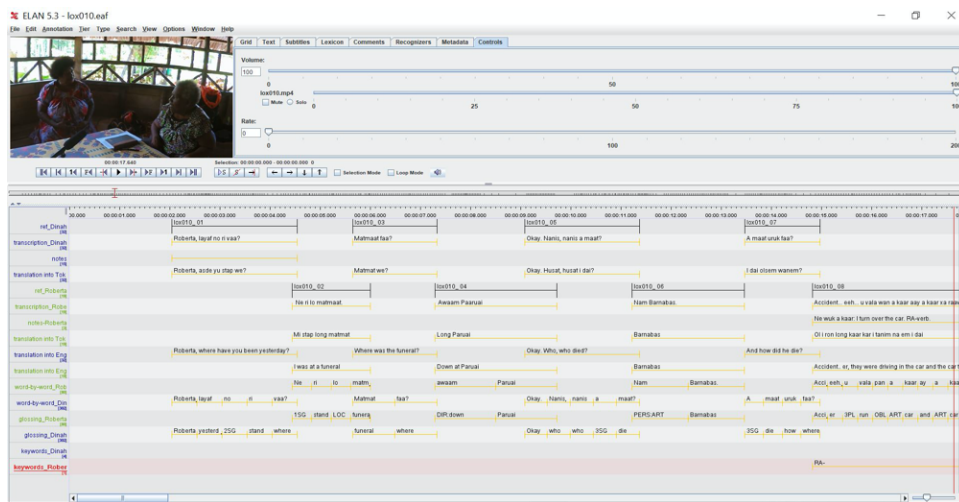
**Figure 6.** Mrs. Sarameli and Mrs. Gurumang in *lox035*.



**2.3 Structure and level of annotation** The Lakurumau corpus in ELAR is organized in sessions, each designated by a unique identifier: the heading *lox* followed by a progressive numeration (*lox001*, *lox002*, etc.). Every session is comprised of primary data (an audio or video recording of a communicative event) and metadata (in .imdi format). The metadata give information on the date of the recording, the participants (speakers, recorder, consultants on the transcription), the genre and subgenre of the recorded event, and on its topic (such as *Second World War*, *death rites*, *food preparation*, etc.). Keywords are used in order to facilitate searches for particular topics in the corpus.

**Figure 7.** Lakurumau people beating sago fiber (*loxox*<sub>15</sub>).

Most of the so far archived sessions have annotations – transcriptions, translation into English, and grammatical or ethnographic notes. Annotations are mostly provided using ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) software, which allows to time-align the transcription to the audio/video recording (Figure 8). Not all sessions have the same level of annotation: only a minority have morpho-syntactic glossing, and some only have transcription and translation in .txt format. In Table 3 I give an overview of the annotation level in the corpus.

**Figure 8.** An ELAN annotation from the Lakurumau corpus; in the video still, Mrs. Sarameli and Mrs. Gurumang.

**Table 3.** Levels of annotation.

	Video (HH:MM:SS)	Audio (HH:MM:SS)
Transcription, free translation in English and morpho-syntactic glossing in ELAN	00:02:42	00:00:00
Transcription and free translation in English in ELAN	17:32:39	00:16:35
Transcription and free translation in English in .txt	00:04:49	00:10:26
No annotation	01:47:50	02:15:44
Total	19:28:00	02:42:45

**2.4 Technology** The technology used for recording is a Zoom Q8 portable video-camera for video recordings (.mov format) and Zoom H4n recorder for audio recordings (.wav format). Usually, I recorded either video or audio; in case of videos, I subsequently extracted the audio using the Avidemux software and converted the .mov format into .mp4 (an archivable format which is also supported in ELAN). Thereby, all sessions comprise an audio file in .wav format and possibly a video file in .mp4 format. In some recordings, I used a shotgun microphone pointed towards the speaker(s), as one can see in Figure 5 above; in most recordings, however, I used Lavalier microphones, placed as close as possible to the speaker's mouth. Lavalier microphones have proved especially useful when recording two or three speakers at the same time, as I could give each of them a microphone. In a few cases, I made video and audio recordings with my cellphone – respectively, in .mp4 and .m4a format.<sup>6</sup> I used the built-in microphones only when recording with the Zoom H4n recorder or my cellphone, as well as in two recordings with the Zoom Q8 video-camera. I usually avoided built-in microphones due to the annoying amount of background noise they captured.

**2.5 Literacy materials** The archive deposit also contains some literacy materials: namely, an alphabet book for school children, a booklet of stories, and the translation of a children's book from English/Tok Pisin. In the alphabet book, Mrs. Gurumang and I included the Lakurumau alphabet with example words, the Lakurumau terms for some animals, plants, colors, and numbers, and the transcripts of three stories Mrs. Gurumang had recorded for the documentation corpus. Similarly, the second booklet, *A ling a bina i Loxodumau* 'The Lakurumau language', contains the transcript of five narratives from the corpus. The *A witbung sam Maria di ramin fadoxoi a vaat* booklet is the translation of the book *Maria's family saves their kin/Femili bilong Maria sevim mani*, authored by Barbara Pamphilon, Kym Simoncini, and Damien Veal from the Australian National University (Canberra). This booklet,

<sup>6</sup>I only used my cellphone in the few occasions when I had no other recording equipment with me and, unexpectedly, I came across interesting linguistic behaviors worth recording (cf. *lox265*, recorded over dinner at the speaker's home).

aimed especially at Papua New Guinean communities and written in both English and Tok Pisin, has the goal of teaching schoolchildren how to save some money; it is freely downloadable from the Internet (<https://www.aciar.gov.au/node/12226>), and some copies are also found in the school in Lakurumau. Finally, the deposit also contains 31 photos of local fauna and flora, with their Lakurumau names.

**2.6 Ethical considerations and access options** At the very beginning of my documentation work in Lakurumau, I took part in several community meetings, explaining the goals of the project and the methods of work. All participants in the recordings have always been asked for consent before recording them; in the case of underage participants I asked their parents or guardians. I only performed covert recording in two cases (cf. the discussion on its acceptability in Dwyer 2006:41). Even though afterwards the participants granted me permission to transcribe and translate the recordings, I decided nevertheless to restrict access to them to myself only. Video files with the recording of informed consent have also been archived. Most sessions are openly accessible to all users registered on ELAR; I have restricted access to those recordings containing sensitive material of various kind (personal information the participants did not wish to make public; proprietary spells; taboo stories owned by a particular clan or individual). In the case of children, I only made the audio files accessible and restricted the access to the video files, upon request of their parents. Finally, I ensured that the community has off-line access to all materials produced during the documentation project. I provided them with printed copies of the booklets and I left at Mrs. Gurumang's house a hard drive with all the recordings (except those with no free access granted by the participants), as well as the Internet address of the Lakurumau corpus on ELAR.

**3. Lakurumau: Language profile**<sup>7</sup> In this section, I will sketch a brief grammatical profile of Lakurumau, both from a typological point of view and with respect to the other languages of the area. I will then provide some basic sociolinguistic information.

**3.1 A grammatical sketch of Lakurumau** Lakurumau has six vocalic phonemes and sixteen consonantal phonemes (Table 4).<sup>8</sup> All unvoiced consonants are affected by lenition, a spirantization phenomenon whereby [f] > [v], [k] > [ɣ], [t] > [r], [p] > [v]/[w],<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Special glosses: AL.POSS alienable possession; ART.NSPEC non-specific article; GR.PL greater plural; PERS.ART personal article; PURP purposive; SM subject marker.

<sup>8</sup>This is only a sketch of the Lakurumau phonology; I plan to write a more detailed account of Lakurumau phonetics and phonology in the future.

<sup>9</sup>Lenited [p] can be realized as [w] or [v], in both Lakurumau words and loanwords from English/Tok Pisin; I have not yet understood the rules that govern allophonic variation. Moreover, /w/ can also be realized as [v] and [β]. In controlled speech, speakers realize [v] and [w], as when producing the minimal pair *a vun* [a vun] 'the turtle' – *a wun* [a wun] 'he tickles a pig on its belly' in an elicitation session. A more detailed phonetic analysis of Lakurumau is needed, in order to understand the exact distribution of these allophones. For simplicity's sake, leniated /p/ is always graphically represented as <w> and leniated /f/ as <v>, even if their phonetic realization may be different.

and [s] > [z] in intervocalic position or between a lateral and a vowel. Lenition operates also beyond word boundaries: *ne waan* [ne wan] ‘I go/went’ vs. *maam paan* [mam pan] ‘we go/went’. Lenition is always orthographically represented in word-initial and word-internal position, but not in word-final position: *ne waan* [ne wan] ‘I go/went’ but *ne zik a pen* [ne ziɣ a pen] ‘I take the pen’ instead of *ne zix a pen*.

**Table 4.** Lakurumau phonemes.

i	u	m	n	ŋ <ng>
ɛ <e>	ɔ <o> <sup>10</sup>	p	b	k
			t	g
			s	
	ɔ <a>		f	ɣ <x>
	a <aa>			j <y>
			l	
		w		

[r] only occurs as an allophone of /t/. *De facto*, [v], [ɣ], [w] and [z] almost always occur as allophones of, respectively, /f/, /k/, /p/, and /s/; however, they have a clear morphological distinctive value in the transitivity – intransitivity distinction for Class II verbs (Table 5 and below in the text; Mazzitelli, to appear). For /k/ – /ɣ/ and /p/ – /w/ also lexical minimal pairs are found: *kon* [kɔn] ‘spoil’ – *xon* [ɣɔn] ‘paddle’; *popo* [popo] ‘baby’ – *powo* [powo] ‘place on one’s right facing the sea’.

**Table 5.** Intransitivity – transitivity alternations in Class II verbs

Verb meaning	Intransitive form	Transitive form
carry on shoulders	<i>faazak</i> [ˈfəzək]	<i>vazaak</i> [vəˈzak]
help	<i>kaabang</i> [ˈkabəŋ]	<i>xabong</i> [ɣəˈbɔŋ]
tie	<i>paala</i> [ˈpalə]	<i>valai</i> [vəˈləi]
hit	<i>sop</i> [sɔp]	<i>zop</i> [zɔp]

The basic word order in Lakurumau is SVO (1a); topical objects are usually left-dislocated, which leads to a frequent structure T(S)V (1b). T and S can coincide (1c):

- (1) a. *Sapos ga daa valik poi a boi akamaam...*  
 if 1SG.SM.IRR IRR go\_down spear ART pig this  
 ‘If I will go down and spear this pig...’ (lox020)
- b. *A boi di ramin lau wan=a xabat*  
 ART pig 3.NSG put on OBL=ART leaf.plate  
 ‘The pig, they put it on the plates’ (lox128)
- c. *A boi xam a mos laba varaatuna*  
 ART pig TOP ART thing big really  
 ‘Pigs are a really important thing’ (lox087)

<sup>10</sup>[e] and [o] occur as allophones of, respectively, /ɛ/ and /ɔ/; they are not distinguished in the practical orthography.

Noun phrases can be marked for dual (*o*=DU.HUMAN; *fu*=DU.NON-HUMAN), trial (*ru*=), and plural (*mu*(*m*)=).<sup>11</sup> Dual and trial can also be marked on verbs by means of suffixes (*-aai* DU; *-taan* TRIAL). All number marking, on both verb and noun phrases, is optional. All non-incorporated noun phrases must have a definiteness marker, either *a* ‘definite, specific’ or *ta* ‘definite, nonspecific’; *a* can combine with deictics (as in *a boi akamaam* ‘this pig’ in 1a).

Nouns can be inalienably or alienably possessed. In the first case, the possessor follows the possessee with no overt morphology involved, and the possessor’s article is realized as an enclitic on the possessee (2a); possessors can also be encoded by suffixes (2b). Alienable possession is expressed through the possessive preposition *sa*(*n*)-.<sup>12</sup> Usually, body-parts, kin relations, and part-whole relations are inalienably possessed.

- (2) a. *Nam daman=a raatai*  
 PERS.ART father=ART man  
 ‘The man’s father’
- b. *Nam damaa-gu*  
 PERS.ART father-1SG.POSS  
 ‘My father’
- c. *A flu zan=a raatai / za-gu*  
 ART house AL.POSS=ART man AL.POSS-1SG.POSS  
 ‘The man’s/ my house’

Verb phrases have the following structure: *full pronoun/subject marker – TAM – valency – root – valency – incorporated object – dual/trial – completive*. Only the subject marking (through a full pronoun or a subject marker) is obligatory; all other elements of the verbal chain are optional; there are no object suffixes.

- (3) a. *Layaf ne ri lo bina laba*  
 yesterday 1SG stand LOC village big  
 ‘Yesterday I was in town’ (*lox014*)
- b. *Ga daa plim aa nanga va-maan*  
 1SG.SM.IRR IRR turn and 1SG.SM CAUS-lie.down  
 ‘I will fold (the cloth) and I will lie it down’ (*lox035-1*)

<sup>11</sup>Number markers are written separately in the Lakurumau orthography: *a mum boi* ‘the pigs’, *a fu boi* ‘the two pigs’.

<sup>12</sup>A reviewer has pointed out that a different analysis of forms like *nam damana raatai* and *sana raatai* is possible, namely *dama-na raatai* ‘father-3SG.POSS man’ and *sa-na raatai* ‘AL.POSS-3SG.POSS man’. This analysis would also make sense, as the form *dama-na* ‘father-3SG.POSS’ also exists independently with the meaning of ‘his/her father’. However, I prefer to consider *damana* as *daman=a* ‘father=ART’ with an epenthetic *-n-* before the cliticized article *a*. My preference is motivated by the possessive forms with personal articles: *nam dama-nam John* ‘PERS.ART father-PERS.ART John’ ‘John’s father’. In such cases, an analysis of *damanam* as *dama-na-m* ‘father-3SG.POSS-PERS.ART’ would be costlier and asymmetrical with respect to possessor’s phrases preceded by the common article. Besides, as one can see in example (4) below, nouns ending in a consonant do not take the *-na* suffix: *a mat=a flu* ‘ART eye=ART house’ ‘the eye of the house, i.e., the door’ vs. *a mat-na* ‘ART eye-3SG.POSS’ ‘his/her eye’.



Objects can be incorporated in the typical Oceanic fashion, defined as “incorporation by juxtaposition” (Mithun 1984) or “noun stripping” (Gerdts 2001). Incorporated objects are stripped of any modifiers and they form a constituent with the verb: all suffixes and enclitics follow the verb complex, and the resulting verb phrase can also be nominalized (4).

- (4) A    *yot*    *boi-an*  
       ART catch pig-NMLZ  
       ‘The capturing of pigs’ (lox213)

Semantically bivalent roots in Lakurumau can be divided into four classes: Class I verbs with labile stems which do not carry any overt marking of transitivity (cf. *plim* ‘fold’ in 3b); the already mentioned Class II verbs showing phonetic alternations between the intransitive and transitive forms; Class III verbs ending in a vowel, which take the transitivizer *-i*: *vaazu* ‘plant.INTR’ – *vazu-i* ‘plant.TR’; and Class IV verbs which show the alternation *-in.TR* (< POC *\*-ani*; Ross n.d.)/*-aai.INTR* (< POC *\*-akin[i]*; Evans 2003:142): *tapi-in* ‘throw.TR’ – *tap-aai* ‘throw.INTR’. Semantically monovalent roots do not show any morphological marking (cf. *ri* ‘stand’ in 2a). A number of valency-changing devices, such as causative *va-*, applicative *-in* and resultative *ta-* are found.

Tense is usually not marked (except for future, which is obligatorily marked with the particle *daa*). Pre-verbal aspect markers are the habitual *vuna*, iterative *vo*, progressive *nga*, durative *i-* and *u-*; post-verbal markers are the change-of-state/contrastive maker *asang* (Mazzitelli 2019) and the completive marker *kaavus*. Reduplication of verbal roots is extensively used with a habitual, iterative or, more rarely, progressive function. Mood markers are the irrealis *daa* (future tense, counterfactuality, imperative), the prohibitive *met*, the desiderative/immediate future *o*, and the potential *pu* ‘might (=there is the possibility that)’.

Matrix and subordinate clauses do not have any special marking, except for third person subject markers: *a* ‘3SG.SM’ and *u* ‘3NSG.SM’ cannot appear in subordinates and are replaced by *ka* ‘3SG.SM’ and *di* ‘3NSG.SM’; *ka* and *di* are also used in irrealis contexts, regardless of the syntactic status of the clause. Subordinates can be introduced by subordinators such as *lo yaan* ‘when’, *pa(n)* ‘for; because of’, *pe(n)* ‘in order to’, *tamo* ‘if’, and the complementizer *o*; there are no relativizers.

- (5) *Tamo ka    vit    ta            boi lo    mat=a    flu    z-im,    gu*  
       if        3SG.SM NEG ART.NSPEC pig LOC eye=ART house POSS-2SG 2SG.SM.IRR  
       *daa zik tap-in    a    maani laba pen=a    maraan-aan=a boi fewuk*  
       IRR take throw-TR ART money big PURP=ART buy-NMLZ=ART pig around  
       *lo    mu maana nombina, pen=a    woxin-aan=a    mu mos akam*  
       LOC PL GR.PL place PURP=ART make=NMLZ=ART PL thing that  
       ‘If you don’t have a pig, you must throw much money around to buy a pig, to  
       do all those things’ (lox087)

**3.2 Lakurumau in the context of the Lavongai/Nalik language chain** The Lavongai (Tungag)/Nalik (henceforth: LN) language chain has been established by Ross (1988:291ff), and it comprises Lavongai (also known as Tungag, Tungak), Tigak, Tiang, Kara, Lakurumau, and Nalik.<sup>13</sup> These languages are spoken in the northern part of New Ireland, the second-largest island in the Bismarck Archipelago, and adjacent smaller islands (Figure 9). Tigak, Kara, and Nalik are spoken on both the West and the East Coast of New Ireland; Lakurumau is only spoken on the East Coast. Ross includes the LN languages in the Meso-Melanesian cluster, together with the other languages of New Ireland and with the languages spoken in the northern tip of New Britain, on the islands of Bali and Vitu, in the Willaumez Peninsula, on Bouganville, and in the north-western part of the Solomon Islands (Ross 1988:257ff). The LN languages enjoy different levels of vitality. In general, they are all still quite vital, especially on the less developed and more isolated West Coast and on Djaul. On the East Coast, instead, the language decline is clear, and Tok Pisin is rapidly becoming the dominant language.

The LN languages have been documented and described to different extents. At present, Tigak and Nalik have fieldwork-based grammars (Beaumont 1979; Volker 1998). Lavongai has a longer grammar (Stamm 1988 [1937]) and a grammar sketch (Fast 1990), while Kara has a grammatical description (Dryer 2013) based on the Bible translation edited by the SIL missionaries Perry and Virginia Schlie, also authors of some papers on Kara phonology and morphology. Tiang is currently being described by Christoph Holz (James Cook University), who will produce a grammar of this language as part of his Ph.D. thesis. Tigak, Tiang, Lavongai, and Kara have Bible translations, at different stages of completeness, and some literacy materials; a couple of booklets in Nalik have been written by Craig Volker and his collaborators. Lakurumau is the first language of the area which has an open access corpus with audio-visual materials.

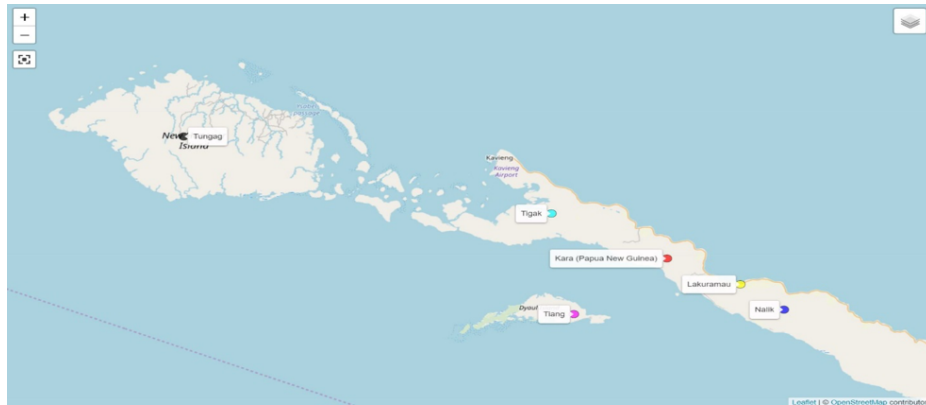
Lexically and grammatically, the LN languages are very similar to each other. Ross (1988:291) lists a number of characteristics shared by all of them; among others, the abstract noun formative *-an* (< POC locative nominalizer *\*-ana*); the inalienable possessive structure *POSSESSEE + sa- + POSSESSOR*,<sup>15</sup> and the de-transitivizing suffix *-(a)ai* (< POC *\*-akin[i]*). As in typical dialect chains, the contiguous members are more similar to each other than non-contiguous members, with Lavongai (the northernmost language) and Nalik (the southernmost language) displaying maximal dif-

<sup>13</sup>Lavongai, Tigak, and Nalik are large enough to have (several) dialectal variations, as acknowledged in the respective grammars. Kara has two quite distinct varieties, Kara East (spoken on the East Coast of New Ireland) and Kara West (spoken on the West Coast); Dryer (2013) is a description based on East Kara; Ross (1988) occasionally points out differences between the two varieties (cf. Ross 1988:266,267). Lakurumau and Tiang are small language communities, with no appreciable dialect differences; however, it must be noted that in the village Panamana, separated from Lakurumau by a low elevation, on the very border with the Nalik-speaking area, yet another variety is spoken, which is, according to the speakers, basically Lakurumau with a strong Nalik influence. I have not yet done any research in Panamana.

<sup>14</sup>Glottolog: <https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tung1294.bimap.html#6/-2.738/150.765>.

<sup>15</sup>Ross (1988:291) interprets LN *s(V)-* forms as a reflex of the POC prepositional verb *\*suRi-* 'follow'. However, these forms may actually reflect POC *\*sa-* (Malcom Ross, p.c.).

**Figure 9.** Northern New Ireland and the languages of the Lavongai (Tungag)/Nalik language chain.<sup>14</sup>



ference. Language boundaries are quite fuzzy, with several villages at the language borders where transitional varieties are spoken.

Lakurumau shares most of its lexicon and many grammatical properties with either Kara or Nalik: for instance, it features the personal article *na(m)* like Kara while Nalik lost it, but it has lost object suffixes like Nalik, while Kara retains 1SG.OBJ and 3SG.OBJ. In the following, I illustrate some unique traits of Lakurumau that cannot be found in any of the two other languages.

**3.2.1 Subject markers** Lakurumau has a system of agreement proclitics (subject markers) with a realis/irrealis distinction not found in Kara and Nalik (Table 6; trial forms are omitted, as they do not add any evidence to the discussion).

**3.2.2 Impersonal *-an*** Kara, quite unexpectedly for an Oceanic language, has a fully-fledged, albeit agentless, passive marked by *-an*. This suffix has been reconstructed as a reflex of PMP nominalizer and voice marker (location subject) *\*-an*, retained in POC as nominalizer and passive marker (Ross n.d.):

- (6) Kara  
     *A vio a punux-an*  
     ART pig 3SG.SM kill-PASS  
     ‘The pig was killed’ (Schlie 1983; my glosses)

In Lakurumau, the same morphology is found (7), with a crucial difference: it does not denote a passive, but a reference impersonal construction (cf. Siewierska 2008 for terminology). The preverbal noun is not a subject as in Kara but a topicalized, left-dislocated object; the subject agreement is always and obligatorily 3NSG, referring to a non-specific, undefined human agent.

**Table 6.** Subject markers in Kara, Nalik, and Lakurumau (cf. Volker 1998:69; Dryer 2013:6).

	1SG.REALIS	1SG.IRREALIS	2SG.REALIS	2SG.IRREALIS	3SG.REALIS	3SG.IRREALIS
Kara		<i>ne</i>		<i>no</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>i</i>
Nalik		<i>ga</i>		<i>gu</i>	<i>a, na, ka</i>	<i>na, ka</i>
Lakurumau	<i>nanga</i>	<i>ga/ge</i>	<i>nangu</i>	<i>gu</i>	<i>a, ka</i>	<i>ka/ke</i>
	1DU.REALIS	1DU.IRREALIS	2DU.REALIS	2DU.IRREALIS	3DU.REALIS	3DU.IRREALIS
Kara	<i>taare</i> .INCL <i>maame</i> .EXCL			<i>me</i>		<i>re</i>
Nalik	<i>di(a)</i> .INCL <i>madi</i> .EXCL			<i>gu</i>		<i>di(a)</i>
Lakurumau	<i>taadi</i> .INCL <i>maadi</i> .EXCL	<i>taa</i> .INCL <i>maa</i> .EXCL	<i>taandu</i>	<i>taan</i>	<i>o, u, di</i>	<i>di</i>
	1PL.REALIS	1PL.IRREALIS	2PL.REALIS	2PL.IRREALIS	3PL.REALIS	3PL.IRREALIS
Kara	<i>taara</i> .INCL <i>maam</i> .EXCL			<i>mi</i>		<i>ri</i>
Nalik	<i>di(ra)</i> .INCL <i>madi</i> .EXCL			<i>nagu</i>		<i>di(a)</i>
Lakurumau	<i>di(ra)</i> .INCL <i>maandi</i> .EXCL	<i>di(ra)</i> .INCL <i>maan</i> .EXCL	<i>nandi</i>	<i>nan</i>	<i>u, di</i>	<i>di, ø</i>

- (7) A    *flu*    *akam u*            *ri*    *bot-in-an*  
 ART house that 3NSG.SM stand cover-TR-AN  
 ‘They had tabooed that house’ (lox120)

In Nalik, there is no similar morphology (Volker 1998; my own fieldwork).

**3.2.3 Object nominalizations** In Kara, nominalizations are formed by means of the suffixes *-an* (subject nominalizations) and *aan(a)* (object nominalizations; Dryer 2013:43ff). In the first case, the nominalization is followed by a *si*-phrase denoting the subject of the nominalized verb (8a); in the second case, free pronouns are used to indicate the object of the nominalized verb (8b):

- (8) a. A    *taangiis-an*    *si-na*  
 ART cry.INTR-NMLZ POSS-3SG  
 ‘Her weeping’ (Dryer 2013: 44)
- b. E    *mi faigot*    *faagut xena usi-aan*    *nenia*  
 and 2PL prepare strong PURP follow-NMLZ 1SG  
 ‘And be well-prepared to follow me.’ (Dryer 2013:47)

In Lakurumau, the same pattern is found, but object nominalizations can either take pronominal affixes or free pronouns. It displays a quite widespread pattern in Oceanic nominalizations: the encoding of actors as alienable possessors (introduced by *sa-*; 9a) and of objects as inalienable possessors (possessive suffixes; 9b). In addition, it also has the possibility of encoding the object argument as a normal verbal argument (9c). In Kara, only the first and third possibility (possessive encoding for subjects, sentential encoding for objects) is possible, at least according to the published descriptions.<sup>16</sup>

- (9) a. A    *ramaai-an*    *sa-gu*  
 ART marry-NMLZ POSS-1SG  
 ‘My marriage; my marrying’ (lox193)
- b. *Pen=a*    *lukaut-aan-(n)angu*  
 PURP=ART take.care-NMLZ-1SG  
 ‘To take care of me’ (lox198)
- c. *No=no*    *gaat every right pen=a*    *planim-aan no*  
 RED=2SG got every right PURP=ART plan-NMLZ 2SG  
 ‘You have every right to make plans for yourself (lit. to plan yourself)’  
 (lox189)

<sup>16</sup>When there is no object, Kara object nominalizations are followed by a suffix *-a*, which Dryer (2013:19) analyzes as an object suffix (even if the 3SG object suffix in finite verbs is *-e*, not *-a*). I think that this *-a* may be better analyzed as the 3SG possessive suffix *-na*, which loses the *-n-* due to contact with the final *-n* of *-aan*. This pattern is limited in Kara to 3 SG; in Lakurumau instead it is widespread in all persons and numbers.

In Nalik, a subject nominalizer *-ing* and an object nominalizer *-aang* are found. Volker (1998) only acknowledges *-ing*, while analyzing *-aang* as a focus marker: according to my analysis, though, the two suffixes have exactly the same functions as Kara and Lakurumau *-an* and *-aan*.<sup>17</sup> In Nalik, the same pattern as in Kara is found:

- (10) a. *Ga na langar a dor-ing si-na*  
 1SG.SM FUT hear ART speak-NMLZ POSS-3SG  
 ‘I will listen to his speech’ (‘to his speaking’) (Volker 1998:128; my glosses)
- b. *A giu-aang=a vaal*  
 ART build-NMLZ=ART house  
 ‘The building of the house’ (Volker 1998:178; my own fieldwork; my glosses)

**3.2.4 TAM markers** As mentioned above, Lakurumau has a number of aspect and mood markers. The irrealis/future reference marker *daa* is found also in Kara (*taa*) and the habitual *vuna* is probably related to the Nalik now perceived as old-fashioned *runa*; the other markers instead, such as the progressive *nga*, durative *u-* and *i-*, are not related, to my best knowledge, to any similar forms in either Kara or Nalik.

**3.3 The speakers’ opinions on the status of Lakurumau** The grammatical notes presented above show that Lakurumau displays a fair degree of independence from both Kara and Nalik in different aspects of its morphosyntax, despite the obvious closeness of the three languages. Even more importantly, perhaps, the classification of Lakurumau as an independent language in the LN language chain is supported by the intuition of its speakers.

The common origin of Kara, Nalik, and Lakurumau is widely acknowledged by the speakers. All three speech communities trace their ancestry back to a village called Baum, on the hills, in the Kara-speaking territory. There, according to oral traditions, the ancestral language Baum was spoken and only when people descended from the hills to the beach the languages differentiated (cf. narratives in *lox135* and *lox167*). Nowadays, the variety of Nalik spoken in the village of Laefu is considered as still being the original Baum language (cf. also Volker 1998:25, who mentions Laefu Nalik as a very conservative variety).

Lakurumau speakers often emphasize the “special” character of Lakurumau. They may use it in order not to be understood by outsiders (speakers of Kara/Nalik, or of other languages); even younger speakers (children and teenagers), who have Tok Pisin as their dominant language, revert to this option when they want not to be understood by peers coming from other language communities. In *lox265* Immanuela Ivarapou, 16, says that she uses Lakurumau in her boarding school as a secret communication code to speak with other girls of the village. This seems to confirm the

<sup>17</sup>The Nalik realization of Proto Lavongai/Nalik *\*-an* as *-ing* is also attested in an unrelated form, the reflex of the POC applicative/transitivizer *\*-ani* (Ross, un.ms.), which is *-an* in Kara, Tigak, and Tiang, *-in* in Lakurumau, and *-ing* in Nalik.



“mutual non-intelligibility” criterion – further evidence of language status. In fact, Kara and Lakurumau are arguably not so lexically different that mutual communication is completely excluded (Nalik is definitely more deviant). I have never witnessed a conversation held in the two languages, but when I read some sentences in Kara to Lakurumau speakers these could quite easily guess their meaning. However, this may also be due to exposure to Kara. Nowadays, Tok Pisin has replaced all regional languages in New Ireland as language of wider communication, but the older generations still used to learn Kara and Nalik to communicate with the neighbors. Mutual comprehension would thus be a product of multilingualism rather than the mutual intelligibility of the languages. Moreover, most Lakurumau speakers are exposed to Kara when they go to the local hospital, situated in Laburua, in the Kara-speaking territory, and when they go to Kavieng, the provincial capital – the town itself is in the Tigak-speaking area, but the passengers and some drivers of the minibuses that connect Lakurumau to Kavieng often speak in Kara. I have not yet tested whether Kara speakers would understand Lakurumau with no previous exposure; the Kara speakers I interviewed, however, have always firmly defended the status of Lakurumau as a “different language”.

**4. Future work directions** Even though the archival collection is already online and openly accessible, as described in the earlier sections of this paper, the work on the Lakurumau corpus is far from completed, and the deposit will still be updated. In particular, over the next few years, I plan to enhance the deposit with two main goals in mind: making the corpus more accessible for the Lakurumau community and producing more academic descriptive material on the language.

At the moment, Lakurumau people have limited access to the online version of the archive, in particular to the annotation material. The main obstacle is that, due to lack of cable connections, the archive can only be accessed via mobile devices (usually cellphones). While video and audio files are easily retrievable also on mobile devices, ELAN files are much more complicated to download. In order to make transcriptions more easily accessible and enjoyable, I plan to add transcripts in plain text (.txt) format. As a second step towards an enhanced usability of the archived collection, I also plan to add, in the future years, Tok Pisin translations of the Lakurumau transcriptions (which are, at the moment, translated into English only).

As for the linguistic research on Lakurumau, I plan first of all to apply for an ISO-code. This may be a formality, but it would establish the status of Lakurumau as an independent language, and it would give more visibility to the language; it would also help establish the glottonym *Lakurumau*. Furthermore, I am working on adding proper morpho-syntactic glossing to the corpus, writing a reference grammar, and publishing a dictionary, ideally trilingual (Lakurumau-English-Tok Pisin).

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